Investigating the Investigators

In medicine they have a name for a disease caused by efforts to heal another malady: iatrogenic. Congressional observers will soon have to find a handy parallel term to describe investigations aimed at uncovering the sins of past investigators. To indicate its displeasure at the appearance of sections of the Pike Committee's CIA report in New York's *Village Voice*, the House voted 269 to 115 in mid-February to have its Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (or ethics committee) launch a thorough investigation of the leak.

Undaunted by CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr's ready admission that he transmitted the text, Representative John J. Flynt (D., Ga.), chairman of the ethics committee, which has conducted no previous major inquiry, called for broadened subpoena powers and a budget of $350,000 to carry out his mandate. As we go to press, the House has responded overwhelmingly to the first request, giving the committee the broadest latitude for gathering written and oral evidence under oath. Money, however, may be another matter; whatever the final allocation, it will have to be substantial to match the rhetoric already expended.

Why this sudden fervor for plugging leaks? Congressional pique at having the decision to withhold the report thwarted by the media partly explains the reaction. More significantly, the House does not want to have its role in foreign policy undermined by the President's charge that it cannot be trusted with sensitive information. The House has both a right and a duty to police itself, and Mr. Flynt has insisted he will not conduct a witch hunt or attempt to pillory "any particular person" (i. e., Mr. Schorr). But the itch to grab the limelight and to spend all of that money may tempt the committee beyond reasonable limits. A free press requires access—sometimes indirect access—to information that politicians and bureaucrats would prefer to bury. We have enough "top secret" stamps already in the Executive Branch.